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# WAR SERVICE OF THE GRADUATES OF THE PROTESTANT HOSPITAL, BORDEAUX, FRANCE

BY ANNA HAMILTON, M.D.

*Bordeaux, France*

There is perhaps not another establishment created for a local charity which has reached the point of radiating beneficent activities all over France like that of the Protestant Hospital of Bordeaux. Since the foundation of this charitable institution, the question of trained nurses had occupied the minds of the trustees and in the first report, which appeared in 1863, they published their intentions in regard to establishing a school. Several forms of organization followed and were gradually perfected until, at the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the hospital, it possessed a school for nurses, trained according to the methods of Florence Nightingale. Only young girls of good education are admitted to a course of two years, with eight hours' daily duty, passing from one department of the hospital to another and receiving the most varied instruction and, in addition, practice at the bedsides of the patients.

Our hospital school, since 1902, has conferred 128 diplomas and counts twenty probationers, who give us the following statistics in 1918:

In active service, 122; married after finishing their studies, 20; established in foreign countries, 5; deceased, 3.

It is interesting to state the activities of our pupils during the first twelve months of the war, from August, 1914, to July, 1915, and to show that many people from all parts of the country have appealed to our school for nurses capable of occupying difficult positions in the ambulances. That which has impressed the doctors everywhere is the practical knowledge of hospital service possessed by our nurses, their capability in regard to all kinds of diseases. Their knowledge is not limited to surgical cases or to the service in the operating rooms; they have no fear of taking charge of any part of the hospital, not even that of contagious diseases. Thus, in spite of the fact that during the first year of the war the larger proportion of hospitals were surgical, half of our nurses in active service were in medical or contagious wards where a competent personnel was most important in order to avoid serious complications and the spread of infection.

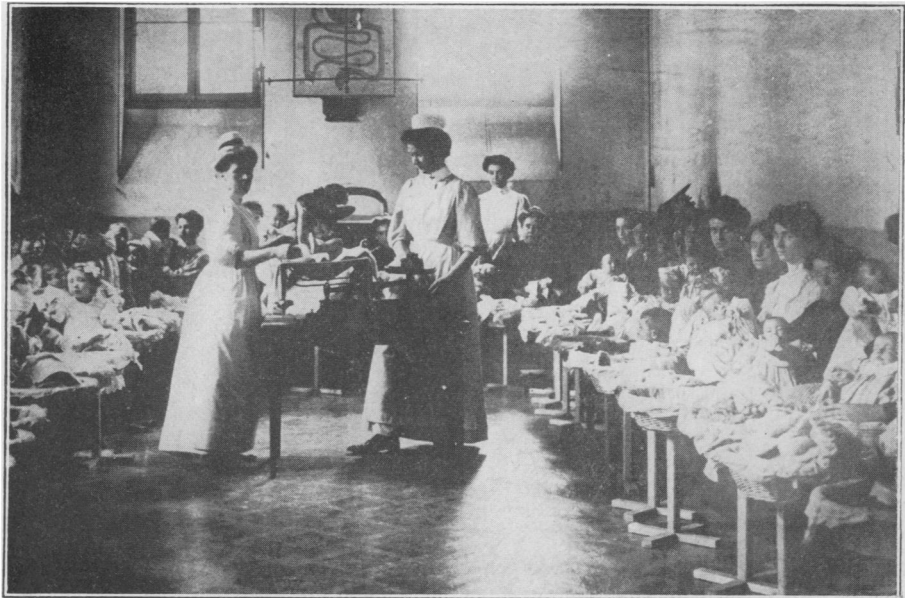
During the first year of the war, 110 of our nurses cared for soldiers, but we have not been able to procure precise information in regard to more than 80 of them. Twenty-three military hospitals, temporary or mixed, have called to the service 37 of our graduates.

In the Red Cross, sixty-five of our pupils have worked in 27 auxiliary hospitals, 11 hospitals of the Society of *Secours Aux Blesses Militaires*, 6 hospitals of the Association of French Women and 10 hospitals of the United Women of France. In addition to these two principal groups three benevolent organizations at Arachon Aouste and Béziers have enrolled our graduates. In foreign lands the Italian Red Cross at Milan and the Belgian Red Cross at Brussels have done the same, and in Egypt one of our old pupils and benefactress directs the Government Hospital at Benha, where the French wounded are received. Our graduates have occupied 58 posts of trust. Many others who possess a competent income and an experience of several years' practice in the hospital have accepted modest positions in order to have the privilege of nursing sick and wounded soldiers.

Our nurses have given 20,146 days' service at 56 ambulances, comprising 15,911 beds; the most part have worked without remuneration; 58 received their living expenses, only, and 20 were not provided with board or lodging. They have all made financial sacrifices for patriotism which only those can understand who have not sufficient incomes to support themselves. There is perhaps no other professional group that has mobilized so spontaneously, sacrificing voluntarily their customary resources without having the compensation of distinction or promotion but, on the contrary, the obligation of continual obscure sacrifice as much from the material point of view as in regard to the legitimate professional self esteem. But in accepting the position of ordinary nurses, our graduates have been of greater benefit to our soldiers because of their direct personal service. It is useful in an operating room, but it is infinitely more appreciated by a patient in a ward, to have the constant care of skilled nurses night and day; above all at night, for the patient only passes through the operating room, while he lives in the ward and there he has imperative need of competent nurses. Moreover, we always advise our graduates to leave operating rooms and surgical dressings to the care of medical students and to concentrate their efforts upon the wards where their ability to soothe and comfort would be so much more valuable to those who suffer. What better role for them than to ameliorate the condition of their patients by preserving order, calm and cleanliness; in other words, the hygiene of service favorable to the cure and saving of life of those grave cases which are more or less at the mercy of careless or ignorant attendants. May our graduates never forget that they are nurses, destined before all things to guard the sick, and not principally to be doctors' aids; though in concentrating their efforts upon the welfare of the sufferers they may become invaluable to the Medical Corps. Especially in working at the bedside of the patient,



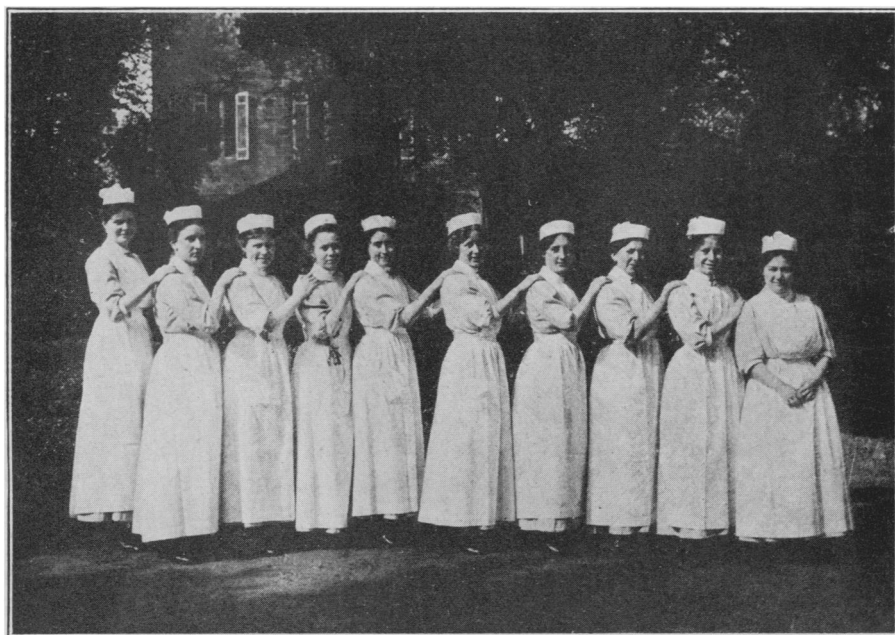
A corner of the children's ward.



Ready for inspection.



Convalescent patients at work.



Nurses of the Florence Nightingale School.

particularly when the doctor is not there, they are veritably fulfilling their destiny.

We have also ascertained with great pleasure the efforts of our pupils to take upon themselves the night service in hospitals. Every one knows what the ordinary night service is in many hospitals. In one ambulance three of our graduates did not hesitate to establish among themselves a night service in rotation for 100 wounded and a typhoid section, in order to watch and direct the personnel of the night service. It was necessary to continue it for three months in order to succeed, although they were just one group of graduates from our school. "We have succeeded in organizing a night service like that of the *Maison de Sante*," wrote one of our nurses. "Each one is on duty two weeks. This idea surprised the doctors at first, but they are very well satisfied with it and the wounded are delighted. Heretofore they were left to the night orderlies and when a hemorrhage occurred, what happened was very bad. We only think of uniting our efforts for the care of the wounded and of being worthy of the *Maison de Sante*." Among our old pupils we feel that their constant desire is that their service shall be the same as it was in their school. One of them, too fatigued after an uninterrupted service of fifteen months in a hospital which kept only typhoid patients who were untransportable, wrote: "I have decided to give up my post of head nurse. It costs me dear. It seems to me that I will leave a part of myself there. I had tried to make the hospital somewhat on the model of the dear *Maison de Sante*. I have succeeded, alas, what will come of it?"

"We have arranged a disinfecting room like the one in the *Maison de Sante*," wrote another, "which fortunately interested the Lieutenant Colonel X., assistant superintendent of the Health Service. He said it was a pleasure to inspect such hospitals. It was explained to him how the disinfecting was done and he was satisfied. In fact the coats, full of cooties and other inhabitants, have been washed with pleasure by the laundresses because they were first disinfected." "Our service grows heavier every day," wrote another of our nurses, "on account of the gravity of the cases which arrive from the trenches, almost exclusively typhoid." War typhoid takes the strangest form, bringing all sorts of complications, and ends in the most unexpected cures or in sudden death. In face of manifestations so unexpected, the most varied treatment is employed and we are very far from the calm and excellent methods of Doctor Peiron.

One of our graduates worked four months in Morocco in the contagious section of a hospital of 300 beds, distributed in a ward paved with large stones. There was no water in the hospital, one wash basin serving for the toilets and to wash the utensils, and sometimes

as a salad bowl. This improvised hospital received cases of paludisme, typhus, and maltese fever, besides having numbers of wounded. Often, at night, balls from Beni-Bou-Jahi whistled over the corrugated iron roof. In these strange surroundings our graduate once received a visit from one of her colleagues, a head nurse in Algeria. "We have often spoken of you and of our school," she wrote; "how many times we have proved how much better were our methods, learned at the *Maison de Sante*, through our various experiences, than are those that we have encountered elsewhere."

Another nurse from the east of Asia wrote: "I prepare all the anaesthetics, either chloroform or ether. We have had as many as 21 operations. That has been the limit, but 15 or 16 is quite usual. We do all the sterilizing in our laboratory and how many times I am up at one o'clock in the morning because my two assistants do not sleep here and leave at seven o'clock. I never worked so hard before the war. We have 700 beds and we are going to have 1,000." What can be said of the anguish of two of our pupils who were obliged during the night to evacuate their hospital? They found themselves alone, in charge of a sanitary train to which a second was attached, without communication between the cars. They were compelled during short stops to go to other parts of the train to minister to this crowd of wounded, who were suffering almost beyond endurance, ignorant as to where they were going and how long the painful journey would last, which for many was only bearable thanks to the hypodermics of morphine which were administered. From one of the water-cures a message came from one of our pupils which made us rejoice at her usefulness. "I cannot wait longer to tell you how often I am grateful to the School. All of us old pupils can thank you in the name of many Frenchmen for the care they will have had, thanks to you. I did not indeed think I would experience the difference between intelligent, conscientious care and the evil produced by ignorance and inexperience. We have tried to inculcate in all our nurses the principles of the *Maison de Sante* and I was happy one day to hear the surgeon who visited all the hospitals, say that our hospital gave him no anxiety because he knew how the patients were cared for."

In the course of this war, hospitals are of necessity very differently equipped; and their personnel, according to circumstances, varies extraordinarily. In one the personnel is scarcely sufficient, in others there is remarkable affluence and in general a variety of nationalities which is not lacking in picturesqueness. An auxiliary hospital of 150 beds in the south included, last year, three directoresses, a head nurse and six graduates of five different schools, a mid-wife and ninety

women signed up for assisting the personnel. In another establishment (a civil hospital) in the north, the personnel was composed of eight different categories of persons destined to nurse the wounded. One can imagine the dose of patience and good-will required in professional nurses who work under these conditions. In the course of this campaign our nurses have had new experiences, some of which have been very painful and hard to bear. But animated by the desire to make themselves useful to their country in its dark hour, they struggle valiantly for the good of our dear sick and wounded soldiers.

They have before them the great task of imperceptibly making their capability felt and of coördinating and directing much of the good-will and assistance so indispensable in time of war; through tact, ability, and good behavior, they make the professional nurse appreciated and truly worthy of her calling, so that one of the blessings growing out of this terrible war shall be to remove the prejudices against nurses.

During the first eighteen months of hostilities, hospital life was known to only a small minority in France, now it has become familiar to the general public and is the subject of much literature. Its special joys and profound emotions, the pleasure gained by alleviating physical and moral suffering in hospitals, have been a revelation to many. It is no longer a question of testing a rare and unusual vocation, but of consecrating one's self to the care of the sick. Young women and young girls have taken the hospitals by storm, while fathers, husbands and brothers have been engaged in repulsing the barbarians. They only think of surrounding the victims of the combat with care and solicitude. May they also realize that hospital life, so new to them, always presents great attractions even in times of peace and that there is always great need of care and consolation. We are hoping that after the victory we shall see our permanent hospitals furnished with a personnel of superior women and in that respect we shall not have to envy our English Allies.

"I am the blue note in the white uniform of the Red Cross," wrote one of the Basque nurses, "and my brassard often intrigues our wounded. One of them thought that the initials M. S. P. B. meant Military Society for the Wounded (*Societe Militaire Pour Blesses*).\" The Blues, as they call our graduates are proud of wearing this uniform, created by their school in 1901.

"The appearance of some persons is frightful. I would never consent to adopt another uniform. Certain posts were refused because our nurses would not give up their uniforms.\" We make this statement with pleasure because it proves the loyalty to our school. May they always be as loyal to this uniform which attaches them to



us and to the sentiment, "Noblesse Oblige." Thanks to this particular uniform our old nurses are often recognized with delight and are immediately received with great kindness. In the same way the City uniform, equally well known, has been for its wearers a means of respect. "Yesterday a colonel saluted me and a group of soldiers followed his example," one of our nurses wrote. In travelling, and going about the streets late at night, this uniform has been a protection to our pupils.

Several of our nurses in the invaded country have had the terrible experience of working under the orders of German officers. Only two of them have been able to communicate their impressions. One of them, a sister of these valiant Alpine Chasseurs, picked up four wounded men and transported them in a hand cart, across a barricade, under fire, to the hospital. "The following day the Prussians were in possession of the hospital and I returned, in order not to abandon our poor prisoners. What a Calvary for me! You know me. To care for the French under the orders of a Prussian officer, and such a Prussian, of the purest type! I was obliged to assist in operations, powerless to prevent barbarous surgery. After fifteen days in this hell, we saw the flight of the savage horde, not daring to believe our eyes." During this cruel period it was necessary to insure the service of the hospital filled with wounded and with new arrivals daily, without water, without gas, without electricity; and under continuous bombardment the service of the hospital was much impaired.

Another of our graduates worked in the Palais Royal of Brussels when the Germans arrived. Her stirring adventures have been published at length. After having continued her service under the Germans for thirty-seven days, she fled. The wounded French and Belgians had been sent to Germany and the French and English nurses were exposed to the same fate. Our nurse decided to save herself with three English nurses, in spite of the protestations of the U. S. Consul, who feared that the result might be fatal. This was the same Consul who made so many efforts to save the heroic Edith Cavell from condemnation and death. The four fugitives, disguised, had their carriage followed by aeroplanes and were compelled to change their route. Then, having reached Ninove, they found that the city had been evacuated the night before. They were forced to go back and take a less direct route to Gand. From thence they went to Ostend and finally reached England.

In terminating this rapid sketch of the activity of our pupils during the war, our thoughts turn to those who are captives and who for long months have been in the invaded cities. They have also worked

under the orders of the Boches. We shall know later under what conditions. Two others of our pupils, a directoress and assistant directoress of the great Hotel Dieu of ———, for several years have never left their posts. We have had news from them indirectly through a seriously wounded and mutilated soldier who was sent home to his family in Havre. He wrote that the German officers had treated these young women with much consideration because they were astonished at their care of the sick. In 1916, these two nurses were accused of treason by the Boches, were imprisoned, and held in secret, but nothing was proved against them.

Our School of trained nurses, thanks to its pupils, has accomplished work that is truly patriotic in caring for our precious defenders in Bordeaux and all over France. Of the 119 nurses in active service, sixty have been admitted to our school under the title *eleves boursieres*.

In facilitating these young girls to enter upon this career of usefulness, the Protestant Hospital of Bordeaux has not only placed them in a position to gain an honorable living, but it has also contributed toward an admirable ambulance service at the moment of our national crisis. If the task is sometimes arduous for those who have striven to prepare these nurses, and if the ground at times seems unyielding, let us not be discouraged, but let us continue to labor, to sow, and to water, with confidence that God himself will give us the harvest. Let us remember the parable of the sower how, if a part of the seed fell upon dry and stony ground, and another part fell among thorns, some fell upon good ground and yielded fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold.

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## SOME EXPERIENCES IN ACTIVE SERVICE—FRANCE

BY GRACE E. ALLISON, R.N.

*Cleveland, Ohio*

### PART IV

*(Continued from page 494)*

During the first few months we were disturbed but little by enemy air raids, "false signals" during the night causing us the inconvenience of being awakened and dressing, being the most serious offense experienced. In the spring of 1918, however, when the firing line was much nearer, raids became rather common, and we experienced as many as five successive night raids in one week. After this,

In the first installment of this article, January JOURNAL, Miss Allison was described as Chief Nurse of Base Hospital No. 4. She is, of course, ex-Chief Nurse.—Ed.